DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 303 736 CG 021 435

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TITLE Crisis Workers' Attributions for Domestic Violence.
PUB DATE Aug 88
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (96th, Atlanta, GA, August 12-16, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attribution Theory; *Battered Women; *Crisis Intervention; *Family Violence; *Hotlines (Public); Victims of Crime; *Volunteers

ABSTRACT

Attributions affect coping with victimization. Battered women who blame their husbands' moods are less likely to leave than are women who blame their husbands' permanent characteristics for the violence. Abused women often have repeated contacts with crisis intervention workers and the attitudes of those workers may affect the attributions made by clients for their husbands' violence. To examine this issue, 52 surveys were completed by volunteers on a crisis intervention hotline for victims of domestic and sexual assault. The surveys asked workers about factors contributing to clients' situations, controllability of those factors, advice they had given, and chances that the situation would be resolved. Perceived resolvability of clients' situations was highly related to perceived controllability. Controllable factors were mainly circumstantial, rather than internal personality factors, except for substance abuse, which was seen as highly controllable. The regression models which best predicted resolvability involved external circumstances and client variables, rather than partner variables. Actions which were associated with high resolvability of situations were actions which would substantially alter clients' situations. Six references and nine tables are included. (Author/NB)

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ED303736

Crisis Workers' Attributions for Domestic Violence

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CG021435

Paper presented at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Atlanta, August, 1988.

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Abstract

Fifty-two surveys were completed by volunteers on a crisis intervention line for victims of domestic and sexual assault. The surveys asked about factors contributing to clients' situations, controllability of those factors, advice they had given, and chances that the situation would be resolved. Perceived resolvability of clients' situations was highly related to perceived controllability. Controllable factors were mainly circumstantial, rather than internal personality factors, except for substance abuse, which was seen as highly controllable. The regression models which best predicted resolvability involved external circumstances and client variables, rather than partner variables. Actions which were associated with high resolvability of situations were actions which would substantially alter clients' situations.

Crisis Workers' Attributions for Domestic Violence

Attributions affect coping with victimization. Blaming one's behavior for a rape may be adaptive because it suggests future control; blaming one's character is not useful, because character is considered permanent (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Battered women who blame their husbands' moods are less likely to leave than those who blame husbands' permanent characteristics (Frieze, 1979).

Literature dealing with attributions for various events suggests variables of potential interest. The extensive literature concerning control indicates that perceptions of control affect how well one copes with and the kinds of efforts one makes in a variety of situations (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1984). The phenomenon of learned helplessness implies that whether one thinks one can control a situation influences whether one attempts to resolve it (Seligman, 1975), a notion which appears to apply to battered wives (Frieze, 1979).

The distinction between responsibility for past situations and ability to alter future events is important for understanding domestic violence. Clearly

the primary responsibility for violence lies with the violent person, yet if the victim relies on the perpetrator to change to end the violence, she may wait forever. Thus, a victim must take some responsibility for altering her situation if it is to change. Madden and Janoff-Bulman (1981) found that women did make the distinction between responsibility for past problems and ability to alter future occurences of nonviolent marital conflict, and that perceived control over recurrences of a conflict were positively related to perceived resolvability of the conflict.

Helpers have biases about responsibility for events. Brickman et al. (1982) describe four models of helping based on helpers' attributions for problems and attributions for solutions. The effectiveness of each model depends on whether the recipient shares the helper's philosophy. Abused women often have repeated contacts with crisis intervention services. The attitudes of crisis workers may affect attributions made by clients, but we do not know how attributions made by crisis helpers affect their advice or expectations that a client will resolve her situation.

Method

Respondents were all volunteers at a 24-hour crisis service for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The agency has existed for ten years, and provides advice about actions and resources, assistance with completing legal papers, emergency housing with private families, and domestic violence and sexual assault support groups. During the first half of 1988, the agency received 341 calls, 234 of which were from battered women. Of the battered women, 69 percent were being abused by a spouse, 15 percent by a cohabitor, 12 percent by an exspouse, 10 percent by an excohabitor, and 10 percent by some other person. Two percent of clients were under 18 year old, 21 percent were between 18 and 24, 50 percent were between 25 and 35, 7 percent were between 46 and 55, and 10 percent were over 55 years old.

It has three full- and one part-time employees, who mainly provide services during business hours and coordinate the volunteers, and 22 volunteers who mainly staff the crisis line outside of business hours. Volunteers initially receive 40 hours of training and then monthly in-service sessions. The training covers literature concerning various situations about which

clients call, such as domestic violence, rape, childhood sexual assault, and substance abuse; discusses legal options and resources for clients; and gives hands-on training on how to handle calls.

Volunteers were mailed questionnaires shortly after they had been on call. They were instructed to think of one female victim of domestic violence and answer the survey concerning her situation. Eighty surveys were distributed over a five month period; 52 were returned. Surveys were returned anonymously to the author.

On 8-point response scales, respondents indicated the importance of various factors contributing to the situation and whether the factors were controllable. They checked whether they had given various items of advice and rank ordered advice they would most like the client to follow. Then they rated the chance that clients would resolve their situations within the next year. (Specific items for each question are listed in the tables in the results section.)

Results

Workers' mean responses to question about factors causing clients' situations and likely actions are shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The most common factors cited as reasons for clients' situations were partners' aggressiveness, dominance, and alcohol abuse, as well as clients' low self-esteem (Table 1). Most controllable factors were drug abuse, alcohol abuse, the client's aggressiveness, physical isolation, lack of transportation, social isolation, and lack of job skills (Table 2). Most likely actions were to think about the situation some more, join a support group, or get a restraining order (Table 3).

Crisis workers' attributions regarding factors affecting clients' situations and their control over these factors were related to their perceptions of the chance that the clients would resolve their situations within a year (Table 4). Factors that were negatively correlated with perceived resolvability included low income, lack of job skills, lack of job opportunities, lack of transportation, social isolation, dependency on the mate, and clients' passivity and aggressiveness. Positively correlated with resolvability were clients' drug abuse, partners' drug abuse, partners'

aggressiveness, and the presence of children.

Workers' perceptions of clients' control over the various factors were usually positively correlated with their perceived resolvability (Table 5). Positive correlates of perceived resolvability included attributions to low income, lack of job skills, alcohol abuse, lack of transportation, physical isolation, social isolation, dependency on the mate, passivity, and low self-esteem. Only clients' control over their own aggressiveness was negatively correlated with resolvability.

Five composite variables were formed by summing responses to items dealing with: 1) internal attributions to the client; 2) internal attributions to her mate; 3) external attributions to the client; 4) external attributions to her mate; and, 5) external circumstances not attributed to either a woman or her partner. Another set of composite variables were formed regarding control over each of the above five factors.

Of these composite variables, positive correlates of perceived resolvability included external attributions to the mate, the client's control over factors internal to her, her control over external

factors related to the mate, and her control over factors external to both mates. Negatively correlated with resolvability were internal attributions to clients, to their mates, and to factors external to both. Thus, workers' perceptions of the chance that clients would resolve their situations were positively related to perceived control over factors associated with themselves, but negatively related to internal attributions or external circumstance (Tables 4 & 5).

Table 6 shows models predicting resolvability developed with regression analyses. The model which best predicts resolvability is a model comprised of variables related to external circumstances. That is, the combination of factors related to the client's circumstances, the partner's circumstances, and factors external to both, along with perceived control over factors external to both, predicted resolvability (multiple r = .99, $p < .001$). A model related to the client, comprised of the client's control over her own personality factors, client's personality, and the client's circumstances, also predicted resolvability well (multiple r = .94, $p < .001$). Thus, perceptions of circumstances and client factors are better predictors of resolvability than partner variables, or

models involving simply factor variables or simply control variables.

The help offered to clients was related to perceived resolvability of the situation (Table 7). T-tests compared resolvability ratings of respondents who offered a particular kind of advice with those who did not give that advice. Workers who gave information about legal aid rated resolvability higher than workers who did not give information about legal aid; workers who gave information about immediate housing, food, restraining orders, the crisis agency, what to do in the long run, who gave emotional support, and who just listened felt the chances that the client would resolve her situation were poorer than workers who did not do any of these things.

When workers were asked what advice they would give if they could get the client to do anything, they felt that clients' situations were more resolvable when preferred advice would be about support groups for partners of alcohol abusers, restraining orders, and emotional support than when they would not give such advice. They rated clients' situations less resolvable when preferred advice would be about job opportunities, moving out of the house or getting the mate to move

out, filing a criminal complaint, or thinking about the situation a little more (Table 8).

When workers were asked what actions clients were likely to take, resolvability was positively correlated with likelihood of returning to school, moving out of the residence, getting treatment for substance abuse, joining a group for partners of substance abusers, and getting a restraining order; resolvability was negatively correlated with likelihood of going on welfare or making the mate leave the residence (Table 9).

Discussion

Crisis intervention workers rate the resolvability of clients' situations as higher when substance abuse and the presence of children are important factors in the situation; they rate resolvability as lower when important factors include clients' lack of resources or clients' personality factors. Correlations between resolvability and composite factors also imply that internal attributions to the client or her mate or attributions to factors external to both partners are negatively related to perceived resolvability.

The relationship between resolvability and the presence of children is consistent with Frieze's (1979) observation that women are more likely to leave a violent relationship when their children are threatened. The negative association between internal attributions and resolvability supports other research indicating that personality characteristics are considered relatively permanent and therefore difficult to change.

The positive correlation between attributions to substance abuse and resolvability is surprising, since it was predicted that substance abuse would be seen as difficult to control or resolve. Perhaps workers feel

there are services for substance abusers, such as private clinics and Alcoholics Anonymous, which will help them more easily change their circumstances than those with situations for which there are not services.

The perceived controllability of most factors was positively correlated with resolvability. In particular, perceived control over internal and external factors attributed to the client and over factors completely external to both partners was positively related to resolvability. This is consistent with much other literature that highlights the importance of perceived control (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1984).

The regression analyses indicate that a variety of attributions are related to perceptions of resolvability. Attributions related to the partner predicted resolvability least well; attributions related to external factors or the client herself predicted resolvability best. This is consistent with the model of attributions for marital conflict proposed by Madden and Janoff-Bulman (1981), who found that attributions of blame for the past were distinct from attributions for resolving conflict in the future. While no one would deny that a violent partner usually

must be primarily to blame for battering relationships, focusing on the client and the external situation may be more indicative of whether the situation will be resolved. In other words, if a client does not do something herself to change the situation, the situation is not likely to change.

These crisis intervention workers use a model of helping that makes the distinction between blame for the problem and responsibility for altering the future. According to the argument of Brickman et al. (1982), a helper will be most effective when recipients of aid share their models of helping. Future research might compare the effectiveness of workers whose models of helping conform to clients' models and workers whose models are not consistent with clients' models. In addition, the training which crisis workers receive must affect how they view their role as helpers. Therefore, an entire agency may have a model of helping which works well for some clients, but not for others.

Resolvability was related to the help that was suggested. When legal aid was suggested, resolvability was higher; most other advice was negatively related to resolvability, including needing emotional support. Logically, a person who is in a situation that is

difficult to resolve would need more help, so the negative correlation of most factors with resolvability makes sense. Legal aid may be a sign that the woman is finally ready to break formal ties with the mate and therefore that resolution is close.

When workers described the advice they would prefer to give clients, they said that situations were more resolvable when they would advise substance abuse treatment, restraining orders, or emotional support, and less resolvable when they would advise moving, filing a criminal complaint, or thinking some more. Situations may be farther from resolution when a woman is still living with the partner, when it is serious enough to warrant a criminal complaint, or when a client has not thought it through.

Regarding actions, clients were thought to be likely to take, resolvability was positively related to actions that would alter their situations, such as returning to school, seeking substance abuse treatment, getting a restraining order, or going to a support group. It was negatively related to actions which would not necessarily improve it, such as going on welfare or making the partner leave home.

These correlations represent the subjective perceptions of crisis intervention workers, not an objective measure of whether situations are resolvable. Whether their estimates of resolvability of women's situations are accurate would be an interesting extension of this preliminary research, which assumes that workers' perceptions of a situation affect the advice they offer. Clearly these workers felt that drug and alcohol abuse, a client's aggressiveness, circumstances such as isolation, and lack of transportation and job skills are controllable and essentially resolvable, since controllability is correlated with resolvability. Whether these attributions are an accurate assessment for any or all clients remains to be seen, but, regardless of accuracy, the attributions undoubtedly do affect the advice which is offered by workers. For example, the notion that substance abuse is controllable probably leads workers to emphasize treatment programs for substance abuse more than they emphasize other features of a client's situation.

In conclusion, workers' perceptions of the resolvability of clients' situations was highly related to controllability. Controllable factors were mainly

circumstantial, rather than internal personality factors, with the exception of substance abuse, which was seen as highly controllable. The regression models which best predicted resolvability involved external circumstances and client variables, rather than partner variables. Actions which were associated with high resolvability of situations were actions which would substantially alter clients' situations.

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Table 1: Crisis workers' mean ratings of the importance of various factors as contributors to clients' situations (8-point scale).

Factor	Mean Importance
low income	4.16
lack of job skills	3.55
lack of job opportunities	2.57
her alcohol abuse	6.02
her mate's alcohol abuse	2.04
her drug abuse	4.07
her mate's drug abuse	2.73
lack of transportation	1.40
physical isolation of home	3.88
social isolation	5.79
her dependency on her mate	5.38
her passivity	6.67
the partner's dominance	7.12
the partner's aggressiveness	2.40
her aggressiveness	5.37
presence of children	6.38
her low self-esteem	6.87

Table 2: Crisis workers' mean ratings of the controllability of various factors contributing to clients' situations (8-point scale).

Factor	Mean Controllability
low income	5.29
lack of job skills	6.02
lack of job opportunities	5.25
her alcohol abuse	7.12
her mate's alcohol abuse	2.37
her drug abuse	7.67
her mate's drug abuse	2.81
lack of transportation	6.36
physical isolation of home	6.62
social isolation	6.02
her dependency on her mate	4.87
her passivity	5.37
the partner's dominance	3.25
the partner's aggressiveness	2.57
her aggressiveness	6.65
presence of children	2.64
her low self-esteem	4.16

Table 3: Crisis workers' mean ratings of the likelihood of clients' taking various actions within the next few months (8-point scale).

Factor	Mean Likelihood
go back to school	1.78
leave the area	1.62
get a job or change jobs	2.11
go on welfare	2.31
move to a different residence with the mate	1.55
move to a different residence without the mate	2.55
make her mate leave her home	2.79
get substance abuse treatment	2.52
go to a program for partners of those who abuse substances	2.96
file a criminal complaint	2.36
get a restraining order	4.25
think about the situation more	6.72
join a support group	4.36

Table 4: Significant correlations between crisis workers' perceptions of the resolvability of clients' situations and of the importance of factors seen as contributing to those situations.

Factor	Correlation with Resolvability
low income	-.34*
lack of job skills	-.38*
lack of job opportunities	-.33*
her alcohol abuse	N.S.
her mate's alcohol abuse	N.S.
her drug abuse	.54***
her mate's drug abuse	.73***
lack of transportation	-.60***
physical isolation of home	N.S.
social isolation	-.55***
her dependency on her mate	-.29*
her passivity	-.73***
the partner's dominance	N.S.
the partner's aggressiveness	.37**
her aggressiveness	-.59***
presence of children	.30*
her low self-esteem	N.S.
Composite Variables	
client's internal characteristics	-.59***
partner's internal characteristics	-.47***
client's external circumstances	N.S.
partner's external circumstances	.39**
circumstances external to both	-.30*

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001
N.S. = nonsignificant

Table 5: Correlations between crisis workers' perceptions of resolvability of clients' situations and controllability of factors seen as contributing to that situation.

Factor	Correlation of Controllability with Resolvability
low income	.71***
lack of job skills	.79***
lack of job opportunities	N.S.
her alcohol abuse	.48***
her mate's alcohol abuse	N.S.
her drug abuse	N.S.
her mate's drug abuse	N.S.
lack of transportation	.81***
physical isolation of home	.34*
social isolation	.72***
her dependency on her mate	.77***
her passivity	.69***
the partner's dominance	N.S.
the partner's aggressiveness	-.39**
her aggressiveness	N.S.
presence of children	N.S.
her low self-esteem	.79***
Composite Variables	
client's internal characteristics	N.S.
partner's internal characteristics	N.S.
client's external circumstances	.62***
partner's external circumstances	N.S.
circumstances external to both	.76***

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001
N.S. = nonsignificant

Table 6: Predictors of resolvability ratings identified by regression analyses.

VARIABLES ENTERED IN ANALYSIS	MULT. R	PREDICTORS	BETAS
Client variables	.94**	Client's person/control	2.59
Client's personality		Client's personality	-4.15
Client's circumstances		Client's circumstances	3.27
Client's personality: control			
Client's circumstances: control			
Partner variable	.58*	Partner's personality	-7.87
Partner's personality		Partner's circum/control	2.24
Partner's circumstances			
Partner's personality: control			
Partner's circumstances: control			
Factors Alone	.84**	Client's personality	-6.69
Client's personality		Client's circumstances	7.32
Client's circumstances		Partner's circumstances	-1.60
Partner's personality			
Partner's circumstances			
External to both			
Control over Factors Alone	.82**	External to both/control	6.05
Client's personality: control		Client's circum/control	-11.86
Client's circumstances: control			
Partner's personality: control			
Partner's circumstances: control			
External to both: control			
External variables	.99**	External to both	-2.08
Client's circumstances		External to both/control	1.28
Partner's circumstances		Partner's circumstances	1.51
External to both		Client's circumstances	.54
Client's circumstances: control			
Partner's circumstances: control			
External to both: control			

*p < .01
**p < .001

Table 7: Mean resolvability ratings given by workers who gave each kind of aid compared to workers who did not give that kind of aid.

Type of Help	Mean Chance of Resolvability (in percentages)	
	Gave Help	Did Not Give
information about immediate housing	45	62*
information about long-term housing	N.S.	
information about fuel assistance	N.S.	
information about legal aid	58	25**
information about lawyers (not legal aid)	N.S.	
information about food sources	48	77*
information about clothing sources	N.S.	
information about restraining orders	23	55**
information about what the agency does	25	56**
emotional support	30	51*
just listening	N.S.	
advice about what to do immediately	27	55**
advice about what to do in the long run	54	22**

*p<.05
**p<.01
N.S. = difference not significant

Table 8: Mean resolvability ratings given by workers who would give each kind of preferred advice compared to workers who would not give that kind of advice.

Type of Advice	Mean Chance of Resolvability (in percentages)	
	Would Give Advice	Would Not Give
go back to school	N.S.	
leave the area	N.S.	
get a job or change jobs	31	60**
go on welfare	N.S.	
move with the mate	N.S.	
move without the mate	36	61*
make her mate leave her home	28	68**
go to a substance abuse treatment	N.S.	
go to a program for partners of those who abuse substances	58	37*
file a criminal complaint	21	62**
get a restraining order	59	29**
think about the situation more	42	60*
join a support group	56	20**

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001
N.S. = difference not significant

Table 9: Correlations between crisis workers' perceptions of the resolvability of clients' situations and of the likelihood of clients' taking various actions in the next few months.

Action	Correlation with Resolvability
go back to school	.37*
leave the area	N.S.
get a job or change jobs	N.S.
go on welfare	-.33*
move with the mate	N.S.
move without the mate	.31*
make her mate leave her home	-.51**
go to a substance abuse treatment	.70***
go to a program for partners of those who abuse substances	.47***
file a criminal complaint	N.S.
get a restraining order	.83***
think about the situation more	N.S.
join a support group	.59***

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001
N.S. = nonsignificant